Springfield Township High School

**Graduation Project Annotated Bibliography**

**Annotation # 8**

**MLA Citation:**

Nussbaum, Paul. "Culture clash cited in delay of railcars." *The Philadelphia Inquirer* 28 Feb. 2011, 273 ed., sec. A: 1. Print.

**Information:**

Paul Nussbaum is a writer for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. He is a staff writer for the newspaper who writes about topics regarding SEPTA and other transportation issues. Nussbaum’s article is intended for lay people who are unaware of the current situation regarding the Silverliner V SEPTA railcars.

**Thesis or main idea:**

The South Philadelphia factory that has fallen far behind schedule in building 117 SEPTA railcars is beset by material shortages, design flaws, inadequate equipment and culture clashes and poor communication between Korean managers and American workers”

**Summary of main arguments:**

In this article Nussbaum claims that there are several reasons for the delay of the Silverliner V SEPTA railcars. Nussbaum argues that because the cars were designed by Hyundai-Rotem, a Korean company, the culture clash has been severe. The railcars should have been completely delivered by now, but currently SEPTA is only using five. Nussbaum also argues that the Korean managers of the plant are hindering progress by utilizing shady manufacturing processes, and not providing a good work environment.

**Summary of evidence:**

* Workers in the assembly plant were hired “unskilled laborers and trained” on site
  + Technicians from Korea had to come in to train workers and perform various assembly tasks
* Hyundai-Rotem’s “first foray into building railcars in the United States” (Nussbaum)
  + “also has contracts to build railcars for the Boston and Los Angeles transit systems” (Nussbaum)
* “Under federal ‘buy American’ requirements, the cars must have about 60 percent American content and labor” (Nussbaum)
* Only 5 of the 120 ordered Silverliner V cars are in service
  + Includes three cars built in South Korea
* Problems with railcars
  + “plagued by faulty communications systems, inadequate heating and cooling systems, balky doors, and computer software glitches. And the cars are 10,000 pounds overweight.” (Nussbaum)
  + SEPTA needs to set a high standard so problems do not crop up in the future
* Hyundai-Rotem was unprepared for an American style of manufacturing
  + First time “encountering American management practices and American labor expectations…grossly underestimated the challenge” (Mitchell qtd. Nussbaum)
* Expected completion date is now “the first half of next year” (Jeong qtd. Nussbaum)
* Difficult to progress because each mistake means that cars currently in production need to be fixed as well.
  + “Workers are told to substitute wrong parts for missing ones, and retrofits are slowing the job” (Nussbaum)
  + “Because of language barriers, instructions often consist of gestures, and workers’ questions cannot be answered’ (Nussbaum)
* Working conditions
  + American workers are looked down upon by their Korean managers
  + “Currently, the hourly wage is $12 or $12.50 for most of the 120 electrical and mechanical workers hired by the TTA…Most team leaders get $15 an hours” (Nussbaum)
  + “5 vacation days after one year. There are no sick days, and no pension or retirement benefits.” (Nussbaum)
  + “A worker making $12 an hour earns $1,920 a month, about $1,000 below Pennsylvania’s eligibility limit--$2,941—for food stamps for a family of four.” (Nussbaum)

**Evaluation:**

I think that this article has a lot of research behind it. It is a piece of investigative journalism that seeks to uncover the reasons for the Silverliner V railcar delays. The article is clearly well researched through the use of interviews and statistics. Nussbaum’s accounts of both the Korean managers and factory workers allow the reader to get both sides of the story. However, the article is biased against the Korean managers and Hyundai-Rotem. The article is pretty critical of their work and managerial practices, and it finds many faults in their management style.

**Reflection:**

When I evaluate SEPTA’s plan for the future sources like this one will be important. It has helped me get an understanding of current progress on SEPTA’s adaptations to a modern transportation system. I think that the flaws the article points out are really interesting and provide a lot of good information on the shortfalls of SEPTA. I think that Hyundai-Rotem’s lack of experience in America is going to be a major problem as the cars are being built. Going forward I want to look more into this ongoing story as well as other things like SEPTA’s electronic ticketing plan. This will be important because its going to give me a good sense of what is currently going on with south-eastern Pennsylvania transportation.

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